



Act One

“I Am...”

2023 Revival

Four New “Reality Checks”

Act One – “I am...”

In Broadway performer Kelli’s Barrett’s online series, “Actors Anonymous,” she uses the Alcoholics Anonymous model as a metaphor for presenting some valuable insights into the acting profession. Her insights are represented in multiple places of this presentation, particularly in Act Two. She deservedly raises a very important concept with her first words: **“My name is Kelli Barrett and I am an actor.”** Job seekers can take a very important first step by examining their own responses to that statement: “I am...”

Several years ago, I was a participant in a residential workshop led by Thomas Crum, author and Aikido master, who teaches about conflict resolution and peak performance – and skiing. On one afternoon of the program, participants found themselves in small groups of 9-10, with one of Tom’s facilitators. The exercise seemed simple. Each of the participants, including the facilitator, was given a paper cup, then given the instruction to think about completing the following statement: “My name is... and I am...” Each person would then “present” their statement to the group. I have facilitated dozens of different icebreaker and other experiential exercises. My first reaction was that this was a relatively simple exercise. Even after the facilitator raised it to a new level, I still thought it was going to be a very short session thinking “there must be something else coming this afternoon.” The facilitator instructed: ***“After a person presents his/her statement to the group, turn your paper cup over if you find the statement to be a genuine, heartfelt statement.”***

The surprises came immediately as participant after participant struggled with convincing the group of the sincerity of their statements. I’ll admit to quickly becoming not only a strong believer in this powerful exercise but also a tough judge of the statements coming from my colleagues. What seemed like obvious statements often became real struggles. One participant could not even complete the second part of the statement, “I am...” and was quickly in tears. Others presented seemingly clear statements – but could not convince the majority of their colleagues to turn their cups over: “My name is... and I am a mother,” and “My name is... and I work with youth,” just two examples of statements that participants struggled with.

Before my turn came, Tom Crum entered the room to observe our group. Now I should explain that I had already participated in another Tom Crum program for

two weeks, learning his approach described in **“The Magic of Conflict.”** That program did not include this exercise, but I did know Tom and he knew me. As a graduate of a Ph.D. program in Counseling, I also had months if not years of working some powerful self-reflection. But “whoa,” the Master is now in the room. My turn came:

“My name is Jim Schreier. I am a teacher who wants to learn more each day.”

It is important to note that the “learn more each day” part is from **“Jonathan Livingston Seagull”** and that the phrase is part of my consulting practice’s mission. When I completed the statement, Tom Crum reached over, took my cup and turned it over. So did 8 out of the other 9 participants. There were comments of congratulations and the one person who did not turn over her cup stated: “I’d just like to know more about what you teach.”

In career workshops, I would include this exercise. In many of my coaching sessions with job seekers, I’ve asked this question – only to receive answers, often adjusted with an “I’m **just** a...,” that aren’t going to “tip the cup.”

Is this a variation on the classic story of three different bricklayers being approached as they worked, each with a different level of conscientiousness and enthusiasm? Yes, it is.

- “I’m laying bricks.”
- “I’m building a house.”
- “I’m building a home for a family to live in.”

It is not very difficult to recognize which bricklayer was working with the most enthusiasm and was doing the best quality work. Here is another of my favorite examples.

As a high school student, I rode city buses to and from school. There was one driver that I often raced out of school to catch his bus, a driver who was different from every other. He did not just “announce,” “Next stop, Center Street,” he “performed” his announcements with enthusiasm, extra information, and frequent humor.

Years later I was presenting a management workshop to the leadership team of this county’s transit system. The topic was

“Managing for Peak Performance” and I told the story of my high school bus driver. A participant asked me: “Jim, what route was that?” When I responded: “Route 30,” the participant said: “Thought so, that’s [name]. He is a senior manager now, and he’ll be in your workshop tomorrow.”

What’s your “I am…” statement? More importantly, does your resume, does your LinkedIn profile, really tell the story of who you are?

In Your Wildest Dreams

If you are struggling with “I have no idea what I really want to do,” here are the basics of an exercise I’ve done with many groups of participants. It’s three simple but challenging steps:

1. If you were “successful beyond your wildest dreams,” what might you be doing?
 - a. Think about some possibilities, positions, companies.
 - b. Identify 10 – 12 parts of your “dreams.”
2. Based on the ideas, and the reality that you’ve been “successful beyond your wildest dreams,” write the graduation speech you’ve been invited to give to your high school or college.
 - a. Pick one of the ideas – you’re welcome to repeat this step for different ideas.
 - b. Outline the 3-5 “messages” you want to deliver in your speech – what’s been the source of your success and satisfaction?
3. Your autobiography has become a best seller
 - a. What’s the title of your book?
 - b. What are the chapter titles?

I have seen this exercise prompt participants to dramatically change their career focus. However, I’ve also seen this exercise re-energize participants in their current careers, often by something as simple as an admission that they really do enjoy what they are doing. Exploration and clarification are keys.

Some Reality Checks

Part of the “I am” message is facing the reality of the job market. Job seekers must abandon some of the common misconceptions and face some realities about the job market.

#1 Getting a Job Isn't Easy!

Too many job seekers think that finding a job is – or should be – easy. In addition, many think that it is easy for an organization to make hiring decisions. The reality is that it is not easy. Maybe at one time, or for some industries, or for some people, it was (or still is). The truth is that for the overwhelming majority of people, this is a complicated process – even for organizations that may have sophisticated processes and trained hiring managers.

For most job seekers it is a rare event, occurring only every 5-7 years. For some, it might be more frequent – for many it is even longer. And face another reality – a very small percentage of job seekers are in the running as the #1 draft candidate in the NFL – or are LeBron James.

Moreover, the overwhelming majority are not skilled (or trained) as job seekers. The solution for this reality is to admit that it is not going to be easy. Take time, focus, and learn skills you may not have. You likely need to learn how to write a quality resume and how to interview effectively. It requires learning and practice.

Performers know this. Kelli Barrett writes she’s “been rejected more times than she’s sneezed.” Performers cannot be passive job seekers; it just doesn’t work that way for them. Job seekers need to adopt a more active role, the more active attitude of performers, as part of their job search. *(There is a lot of material related to this point in Act Two and in Act Four.)*

#2 Nobody “Owes You” a Job or an Interview

There are too many people in the job market who clearly display an attitude that they are “owed” a particular job or an interview. This is more than confidence, different than “practiced” statements of your accomplishments – it is an arrogance sometimes revealed in the superlatives of resumes or interview responses. A simple response for this: constantly show your appreciation for

being considered – even if you feel an organization is not responding the way you'd like them to.

Again, actors understand this. They are acutely aware that they are only as good as their last gig. They must display confidence in their abilities to perform a scene, or a dance routine, or a song. Moreover, they know they need to perform what the casting director wants – not what they want to present.

#3 You Aren't Powerless – But It's Close

In today's market, with a lot more candidates for most positions, the power is clearly in the hands of potential employers. They can afford to be choosier now than ever before because they are likely to have more candidates, more options for efficiencies, more options for automation. The opening scene of "Chorus Line" has always struck me as containing an important message for job seekers. Within the first few minutes of the audition, more than ¾'s of the performers are dismissed. It's a good picture of what happens to many job seekers today when that HR recruiter searches the database of resumes submitted and quickly rejects 90% of them.

But you do have some power. It is repetitive, but your power lies in the preparation and practice you put into your job search. It represents the work you expend to really understand your strengths and your accomplishments.

#4 You're Unique, But You're Not

You are a unique individual – we all hear and read that a lot. And it's true – but it is not much of a valued card to play as part of the job search. To the computer program scanning your qualifications and the hiring manager scanning 100's of resumes, you are a lot like every other candidate with "x" years of experience in "y" field, with "z" number of solid references. Again, this is an attitude piece – and again it is your preparation and practice that can really distinguish you from a crowded field.

#5 You're on a Stage

Maybe that's uncomfortable – and you're not the producer or the director. You are auditioning without a script – often not even knowing the part you may play. The job posting you read online may not accurately describe what's really expected – the job description may be nothing more than basic, routine tasks. Moreover, you're not in control – you really are auditioning on a stage for one or multiple observers. But that's the good news. For many auditions, performers initially get to choose the song they'll perform first. Only later are they challenged (and given the opportunity to rehearse) with a song from the show. I've trained 1000's of interviewers, and I train them to ask candidates about their "most significant accomplishment" first. It is your chance to shine. So be prepared by having well prepared, specific stories that represent your accomplishments – whether in your current, or previous or school experiences.

#6 "I Don't Have Time" Is the Worst Excuse

When I am counseling or speaking to a group of students or job seekers, I frequently hear the "It takes too much time" or "I don't have the time" excuses. I know that the excuse often masks uncertainty of what to do or fear of what is for many people a scary process. I've also heard from job seekers who spend hours submitting resumes, even weekly attending meetings with fellow job seekers – yet they're still pursuing an unrealistic goal or repeating the same mistakes again and again and again. I've had multiple people challenge me after one of my presentations on resumes with their (awful!) resumes that they "know" are great.

You have the time! Get up 15 minutes early each day and work on your resume – or practice your interview responses. Watch one less television show this week and spend an hour improving your job-hunting skills. If it is fear, admit it and work with someone who can improve your performance at that audition. I repeat:

You have the time – quit procrastinating – quit the excuses!

Encore

- Who are you? Complete that question: I am...
- Face the realities:
 - You have absolutely no right to a job – or a particular job.
 - You have absolutely no right to an interview for any job.
 - You do have the freedom to submit your application/resume for consideration.
 - You do have the freedom to develop and practice your skills, to enroll in workshops, courses, and the expanding world of online learning.

The “2023 Revival”

Much has changed in terms of “I am...” and “Reality Checks.” Here are some key thoughts for the 2023 Revival of **“Audition Interview for Your Next Job.”**

In Act Nine, I raised the issue, in the context of thinking about the future, of having a vision for the future. Specifically, I noted **“What Color Is Your Parachute?”** author, Richard Nelson Bolles, and his treatise on “Mission.” He laid out the argument for developing your personal, family, and career mission.

In 2023, individuals and organizations have raised mission to new levels of importance. Organization’s social or environmental awareness has become predominant in an overwhelming number of organizations. If you buy a pair of socks, you may be supporting the donation of a pair to the homeless. If you buy a bracelet, you may be supporting the removal of trash from the ocean – and buying a bracelet made of plastic bottles recovered.

A LinkedIn survey revealed 64.7% of job seekers “saying that not knowing, or disagreeing with, a company’s mission, values or purpose is a deal-breaker when considering a future employer.” Unfortunately, the survey also revealed that many organizations are failing to articulate these elements.

Some New Reality Checks

In 2023, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been a major disruptor of the job market, creating chaos, closed businesses, lost jobs, and “the great resignation.” Organizations are facing never seen before challenges in hiring and retaining employees. So, what does this mean in the context of “**Audition Interview for Your Next Job?**” Here are some additions to the points above.

#7 It’s More Important Than Ever to Think about Your Mission (Purpose)

Just because there are lots of jobs available doesn’t mean you should leap to the one with slightly better pay or benefits or... Think long term (See Act Nine).

#8 Think about Your Strengths – What You Really Enjoy Doing

The chaos of 2020-2021 has led to high levels of turnover and fast “job-switching.” While much of this has been caused by the circumstances, it’s not the best route to a “career-defining” starring role.

#9 Take Additional Time in Your Search

Even if it’s just a little, extra time in your preparation (for your resume, your interviews, your LinkedIn profile, your networking) will make a big difference. If you have an offer – or offers – take just a little more time to evaluate the options and decide.

#10 Artificial Intelligence and ChatBots Have Changed Hiring

...and the job search. This will be a completely new component of the process. Is it connected to the performing arts? We’ll see!

A Second Encore

- It is critical today for you to think about your desired “purpose” or “mission” for your career. Working with a career coach can be particularly helpful in this aspect.
- The job market never gets easier. It’s always more challenging.
- Your “strengths” represent just one area where assessment can be a valuable part of your career search. Use knowledge of your strengths, emotional intelligence, and personality to your advantage.

Interlude II - Application Errors

Application forms and cover letters often contain grammatical and typographical errors that can seriously hinder a person's chances in the hiring process. They sometimes include statements from candidates that just prompt a "Huh?" There are many skills necessary to undertake the rigors of a career search. A sense of humor is a very important one!

- **Size of Employer:** Very tall, probably over 6'5"
- **Reason for Leaving:** Responsibility makes me nervous.
- **Reason for Leaving:** They insisted that all employees get to work by 8:45 every morning. Couldn't work under those conditions.
- **Reason for Leaving:** The company made me a scapegoat – just like my three previous employers.
- **Accomplishments:** Completed 11 years of high school.
- *Please disregard the enclosed resume – it is terribly out of date.*
- *Finished 8th in my high school graduating class of 10.*
- *Please call me after 5:30 because I am self-employed, and my employer does not know I am looking for another job.*